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Veterinary Services Careers Program: Leading the Charge To Safeguard Animal Health

Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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Cover: Veterinary Services leads the charge to safeguard animal health for the U.S. Department of Agriculture with its various activities from the laboratory to the farm.

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Taking the Lead in Safeguarding Animal Health

Veterinary Services (VS)—a part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—is responsible for protecting and improving the health, quality, and marketability of the Nation's agricultural animals, animal products, and veterinary biologics. VS practices preventive veterinary medicine on a broad scale, dealing with animal health problems of statewide, regional,

national, and international importance. These broad responsibilities can have a profound effect on many aspects of American agriculture and animal health, especially the success of U.S. agricultural exports in world trade.

VS supports the livestock industry in the prevention and control of animal diseases that could otherwise be devastating. VS activities have international significance

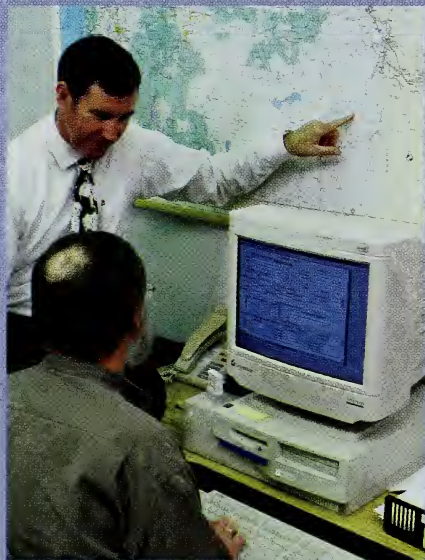


"I didn't realize how valuable my field training was until I was employed at the headquarters level. When difficult situations arise, I have relied on my field experience and problem-solving abilities. Having that different perspective has allowed me to gain a better understanding of the vast work of Veterinary Services."

—Aida Boghossian, D.V.M.

Senior Staff Veterinarian, Emergency Programs, Maryland

APHIS photo by R. Anson Eaglin.



"Of course, with a name like Herriott, I had always dreamed of a career like veterinarian James Herriot, author of *All Creatures Great and Small*. It wasn't long before I realized clinical practice was not going to provide the fulfillment and challenge I was looking for. A brochure describing the VS careers program caught my eye and changed my life. This program exposed me to the many opportunities available within APHIS. For me, the most appealing area of concentration was veterinary epidemiology. This field allowed me to use my analytical

skills and challenged me in new ways with each outbreak. VS provided the training I needed and the opportunity to apply my newly acquired epidemiological skills with my first position as an area epidemiology officer. I have never questioned or regretted my decision to pursue a very fulfilling career in public veterinary medicine."

—Don Herriott, D.V.M.

Area Veterinarian-in-Charge, Oregon

USDA photo by Michael Thompson.

through import-export and emergency response programs. VS employees also ascertain that all licensed animal biological products distributed interstate, like vaccines, are pure, safe, potent, and effective.

As a regulatory agency, APHIS uses a collaborative rulemaking process that enables it to adapt to industry needs in a changing environment. The VS program is moving to a more broad-based public service

role in order to better serve stakeholders and constituents and meet the demand for increased services. VS plays an important role in safeguarding America's animal health. And the best way that VS can stay on the cutting edge of veterinary science is to recruit and hire professionals with the best credentials and experience—people like you.

A Career Choice That Can Make a Difference

A career in public veterinary health affords you the opportunity to be involved with the health of major animal populations in many activity areas. Veterinarians have a responsibility for the health of the Nation's animals, and public health veterinarians can have a broad and lasting impact on animal health issues. Animal health technicians perform a variety of specialized duties that support our public health mission.

A hallmark of VS is its multidisciplinary approach to working on animal health issues. VS has employment opportunities in the public veterinary field for highly qualified, technically advanced professionals from a variety of disciplines. In addition to veterinary medicine, some of the many vital areas represented across VS include epidemiology, agricultural economics, biotechnology, toxicology, and entomology.

Employment opportunities are located throughout the United States, from headquarters in Riverdale, MD (just outside Washington, DC), to field offices in every State, and at border ports throughout the country.

Through the Veterinary Services Careers Program (VSCP), prospective employees will find a work

environment rich in individualized learning opportunities—both on the job and through a variety of educational and training resources.

How the VSCP Works

The VSCP is a recruitment and training program established to meet APHIS' need for highly skilled, forward-looking, well-trained employees—primarily within VS. Formerly called the Public Veterinary Practice Careers Program, the VSCP is being expanded to include additional professions beyond the veterinary field.

The VSCP is designed to provide a support system for new employees to ensure a smooth transition into Federal service. The program can maximize developmental opportunities so participants are ready to meet the challenges of public veterinary health in our fast-paced society.

The VSCP is offered several times a year for prospective employees. Those applying through the VSCP announcement automatically become part of this program. The APHIS Web site, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>, and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) site, <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>, post available job opportunities.

Veterinarian candidates selected for the VSCP will be hired into the civil service at either the GS-9, GS-11, or GS-12 salary level, depending on previous experience.

Animal health technicians will be hired at either the GS-5, GS-6, or GS-7 salary level, depending on previous experience. The individual's initial job is a career-conditional appointment with flexible benefits (health insurance, life insurance, family-friendly programs, retirement plans, etc.). Participants who successfully complete the VSCP training program and who meet OPM eligibility qualifications and requirements are eligible for promotion to the next grade level for that position. After 3 years of successful performance, their status converts from career conditional to permanent.

Training Fits Individual Needs

New employees receive a general orientation as well as technical and scientific training that lasts about 9 months to a year. The core VSCP training courses introduce new employees to Federal service in general and to APHIS and VS programs in particular. The program focuses on VS' multifaceted regulatory and collaborative role in safeguarding U.S. livestock and poultry industries to promote animal health domestically and enhance livestock exporting opportunities. In addition to the orientation, the VSCP courses cover significant domestic



"In my work as a field veterinary medical officer, my duties are diverse and challenging. Traveling locally and throughout the United States, I have the opportunity to assist in international animal import and export issues, investigate unusual animal disease occurrences, work on animal welfare issues, and contribute to the health of our Nation's agricultural economy through disease eradication and surveillance programs. USDA veterinarians are encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities that are regularly offered to further enhance our skills and knowledge. I also interact with the local veterinary college, fostering an exchange of information and opportunities with the students and academic community.

The career path I have chosen has certainly been rewarding and has provided ample opportunities for personal and professional growth."

—Lynette Tobias, D.V.M.
Veterinary Medical Officer, Virginia
USDA photo by Norman Watkins.



“This program was an excellent orientation to a very exciting and rewarding career with USDA. The program provided me with the basics required to function as a public services veterinarian. The training consisted of an orientation

class, a significant diseases class, and introduction to epidemiology; and to complete the training we conducted a field exercise in Alabama. Each respective class was very important in the development of my career with APHIS. This program also provides an invaluable network of colleagues that I rely on heavily today. Even though it was an orientation training program, this program paved the way for more advanced training and additional career development.”

—Terry Clark, D.V.M.

Native American Program Coordinator, North Carolina

USDA photo by Ken Hammond.

diseases, foreign animal disease awareness, basic epidemiology, and emerging issues and initiatives. After completing the VSCP curriculum, employees have an awareness of VS' future direction; knowledge about how today's activities, initiatives, and issues fit together; and an appreciation for their own role in the organization.

An integral part of the VSCP is an individual learning contract, which employees develop with assistance from their supervisors, mentors, and APHIS training professionals. This learning contract serves as a

roadmap and timeline for achieving specific learning goals, and provides a model for continued use throughout the employee's career. Additionally, employees can develop temporary work details to expand specific areas of their knowledge. Each new member of the VSCP is paired with a mentor or coach to make the transition into VS both easy and meaningful and to enable the employee to take advantage of the resources and experiences available in the agency.

In developing a learning contract, employees can tap into a variety of educational and training resources, including internal courses sponsored by the agency and outside sources such as universities, professional organizations, and self-paced Web-based coursework. Because APHIS employees are located throughout the country, they use distance learning technologies such as CD-ROM programs and Net conferences to access training in a timeframe that meets their needs and to learn at their own pace. Several classroom training sessions bring VSCP employees together as a group. These sessions provide an opportunity to meet key APHIS staff, participate in hands-on training for both scientific and interpersonal skills, and network with each other.

Rotational Assignments

In addition to on-the-job training, VSCP participants complete several rotational assignments in specialized areas. Through hands-on experience in a variety of work environments, such as headquarters, ports of entry, laboratories, or on special task forces, new employees will quickly see how various areas function independently and collaboratively.

About the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Through its Veterinary Services, Plant Protection and Quarantine, Animal Care, International Services, and Wildlife Services programs, APHIS protects America's animal and plant resources from invasive pests and diseases and monitors and manages foreign agricultural pests and diseases existing in the United States. The agency also resolves and manages trade issues related to animal or plant health, ensures the humane care and treatment of certain animals, manages wildlife conflicts, and makes sure that all licensed animal biological products distributed interstate are pure, safe, potent, and effective.

Because of its technical expertise in assessing and regulating the risks associated with agricultural imports, APHIS has become much more involved in trade issues in recent years. The agency responds to other countries' import requirements and negotiates science-based standards to ensure that America's agricultural exports, worth over \$50 billion annually, are protected from unjustified trade restrictions. A major goal of the agency is to support the establishment of harmonized, international science-based health standards. APHIS' protection role also includes wildlife damage management, the welfare of animals, human health and safety, and ecosystems vulnerable to invasive pests and pathogens.



"I spent 5 years in private practice before joining VS. After 13 years with the program, I feel that the variety of opportunity I was looking for is definitely here. I elected to pursue several interests and have volunteered to work on different projects. I have been involved in epidemiology, computer mapping, and even international travel. Currently, I have responsibility for the brucellosis program in the United States. I have found my VS jobs very rewarding, professionally and personally. The careers program fosters a network of members within VS, and I enjoy contact with fellow grads of the program who are stationed elsewhere in the field and at headquarters."

—Valerie E. Ragan, D.V.M.
National Brucellosis Epidemiologist,
Senior Staff Veterinarian, Maryland

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www.aphis.usda.gov/vs